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The Editor

Celebrating the channel

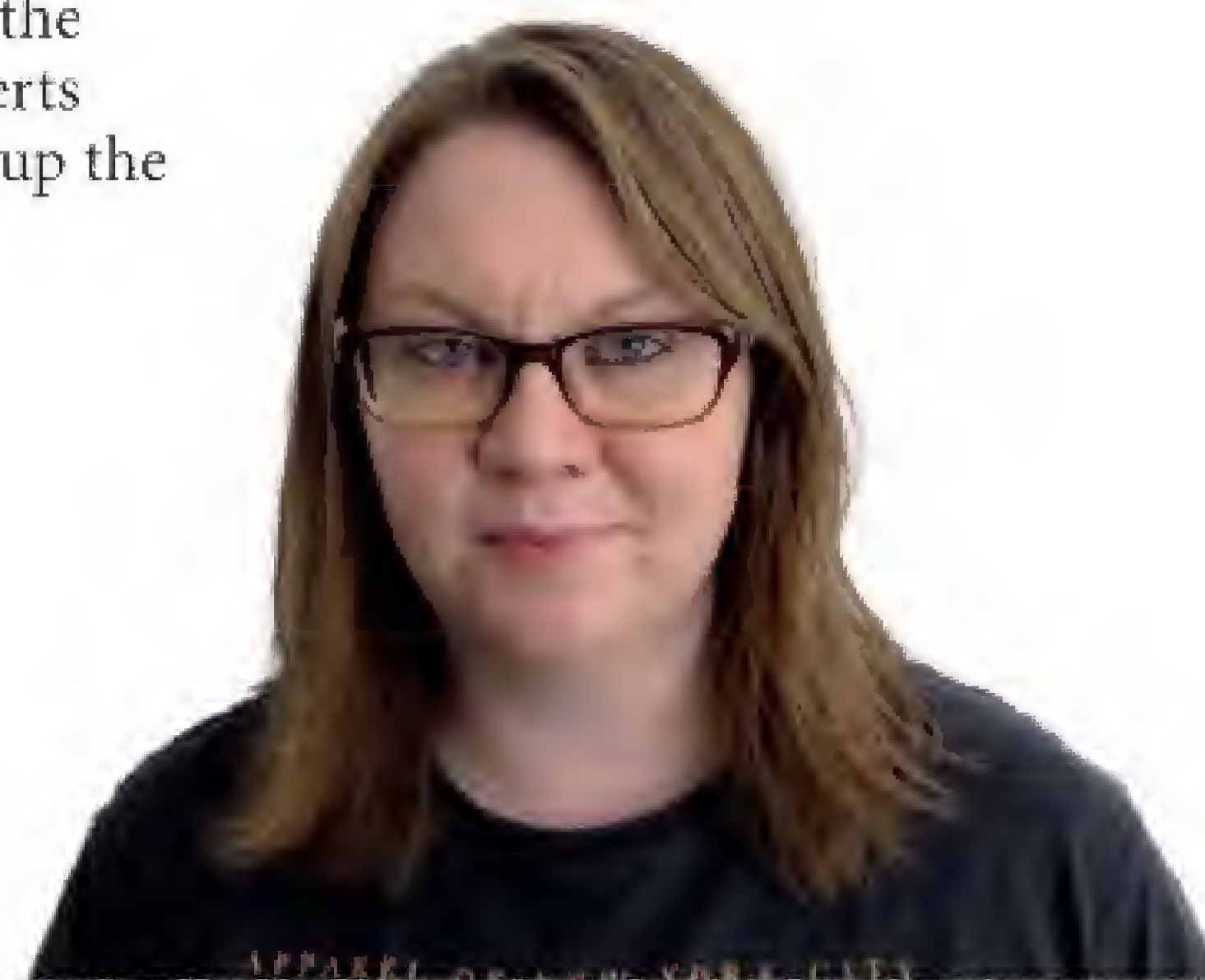
If you've managed to pick up this copy of *PCR*
before March 4th, you'll be just days away from
our annual awards show. For 2020 we've really
tried to ramp things up, with new awards being
introduced, exciting after party activities, and a
household name to host the event – *Strictly Come
Dancing's* Claudia Winkleman.

Good luck to all those that made it onto the
shortlist for the PCR Awards 2020, and a massive
thank you to all our Partners: HANNspree as Event
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as Event Partner, and QBS Distribution as Dining
Room Partner.

If you haven't got around to reading this until after
the event, I hope our informative feature outlining all
the biggest and brightest distributors in the industry
(p18) will help to sooth your hangover.

If that doesn't do the trick, we also delve into the
rugged tech sector, as we find out from the experts
what this landscape looks like (p24) and round up the
latest tough tech in our sector guide (p42). ☑

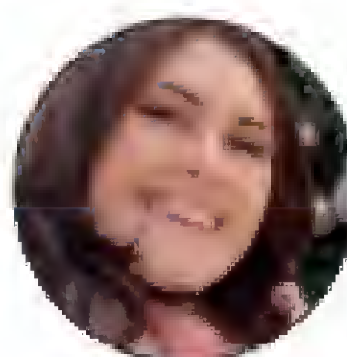
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for the PCR
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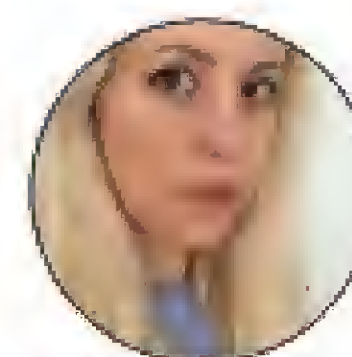
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PCRmag

Is UK retail finally bouncing back?

With a new report from ONS showing that retail sales were up in the UK in January, **Laura Barnes** looks at how this may be a turning point for the high street...

Over the past couple of years it has been difficult to weed out the positive news about the state of the UK high streets, as most headlines have been occupied by the words like “Brexit”, “Negotiations”, “Uncertainty” and so on.

While we’re still working out the exact details of the UK’s trading options, it appears that consumers are starting to relax and become less uncertain and concerned about spending their money.

This is reflected in the latest ONS retail results for January 2020, which found that retail volumes increased by 0.9% that month, and was almost equally split between food and non-food stores, showing that it’s not just groceries that consumers are starting to splash the cash on.

This was the largest monthly rise since March 2019, and a stronger performance than was expected by economists.

As reported by London Loves Business, Ranko Berich, head of market analysis at Monex Europe, commented that January’s retail sales report suggests that “UK consumers are joining in the burst of optimism experienced by businesses in the new year”.

Berich comments: “Retail sales, like business sentiment, had been stagnating for most of the second half of 2019. The

sharp increase in January suggests this may have been due to the same political uncertainty that hampered business sentiment.

“ONS seasonal adjustments may have added more noise than signal over the past couple of months. Unadjusted core retail sales actually fell 29.1% month on month, which is typical for January. But January’s adjusted of 1.6% increase comes after an adjusted fall of 0.8% in December, when the unadjusted figure was, confusingly, actually showing fairly decent growth.

“This noise is understandable given the political uncertainty in Q4, changes in consumer shopping habits, and black Friday timing. However, in this instance, the adjusted December and November figures may have given an overly negative impression of UK consumption.”

Berich continues: “In isolation, you’d be tempted to apply the usual caveats and disregard retail sales as one data point in a volatile series. But, other incoming UK data also suggests a strong pickup for the economy: business sentiment has improved sharply and house price growth has accelerated. Whatever the coronavirus shock and EU trade negotiations hold for the future, the UK economy has at least begun the year on a firm note.”



“There is still plenty of opportunity for businesses of all shapes to not just survive, but thrive”

Jon Buss, Yext

Despite the rebound seen in January, sales for the three-months to end-January fell, with the number of goods bought falling by 0.8% and declines across all sectors during the quarter.

In fact, previous research by the British Retail Consortium (BRC) suggested that 2019 may have been the worst year in 25 years for retailers, pointing out that total sales fell by 0.1% – the first annual sales decline since 1995.

For 2019’s Christmas period in particular, ONS reported

that overall sales in December were down 0.6% against November’s official figures, with UK courier services ParcelHero saying only e-commerce sales prevented a complete retail collapse this Christmas.

“December’s retail sales results were a grimly fitting finale to a truly dire year for retailers,” says ParcelHero’s head of consumer research, David Jinks MILT.

“Spending was down 0.3% and the amount we bought down 0.6% against November. The one bright point was a strong performance for many retailers’ websites. Online spending was up 1.6% against November, with department stores’ web sales booming: up a heartening 15.5% against November.

“Footfall may be falling, but many consumers still prefer to buy more valuable gifts from familiar stores – even if they chose to do so online,” points out Jinks.

“And there was more good news for retailers as their overall online sales grew 5.6% against December 2018. That’s a strong year-on-year result.”

Jinks concludes: “Overall, December’s retail figures show shoppers like the peace of mind of the extra 14 day no quibble returns that online sales enjoy, but still like to buy from big name retailers. The close collaboration between stores and the



“Customer expectations have shifted with many preferring to purchase goods online rather than in physical stores”

Anne Sheehan, Vodafone Business

courier services trusted for their home deliveries means shoppers were happy to have more items than ever delivered to their homes this Christmas.”

Back to January 2020, and while the retail figures are positive, it's not quite plain sailing just yet. Jon Buss, MD of UK and Northern Europe at Yext, shared his thoughts on what retailers need to address so that they can continue this growth and keep up with consumer expectations.

“Boosted by January discounts, it's positive to see that sales at the start of the year grew slightly – however there is still plenty of opportunity for businesses of all shapes to not just survive, but thrive.

“While online retailers may be going from strength-to-strength, a huge chunk of the overall retail market still lies at the feet of the high street. With bricks and mortar retail holding the majority of sales, talk of retail doomsday is far off,” says Buss.

“To continue this growth, the fusing of offline and online retail must become even more prevalent. Today, the modern consumer's first step of a retail journey begins online, so having the correct information such as answers to FAQs, hours of operation or even an address or phone number – could be the difference between heading to the high street or not. And essentially a sale made or lost.”

Buss says that while many retailers are largely focused on the in-store experience, they are often neglecting the very start of the customer journey, which he says so often begins online with a search query.

“Delivering the right information – i.e. making sure brands are ready to provide answers on their websites and on the major platforms like Google, mapping apps, social sites and voice search – is imperative to ensuring that an online search translates into an in-store experience.

He adds: “In a world where data and information is a currency of its own, it pays to be right every time. For retailers, attracting and retaining loyal customers, building a reputation and competing with online retailers will stem from providing shoppers with the right information, consistently.”

Commenting on the ONS report, Anne Sheehan, director at Vodafone Business, says: “A number of factors have led to the transformation of the retail sector over the years; customer expectations have shifted with many consumers preferring to purchase goods online than in physical stores; same-day delivery is commonplace; and an ‘always on’ approach to customer service is required to respond to any and all requests.

“Retailers are now on the cusp of a whole new era. The introduction of technologies such as 5G, the Internet of Things (IoT), augmented reality (AR) and virtual reality (VR) will drive innovation and new customer experiences; and enable retailers to deliver better value to customers whether in store, at home or on the go – from tailored deals and promotions to uniquely personal in-store experiences.”

There's no doubt that the UK high street still has a lot to battle against, with its decline being attributed to a range of causes. High business rates, national living wage rises, Brexit and weak consumer confidence are all factors that today's UK retailers come up against.

But as we start to feel a conclusion is in sight for Brexit and consumers are in turn getting their buying confidence back, 2020 could be the year we start to see some real, positive change in the retail sector. [P](#)

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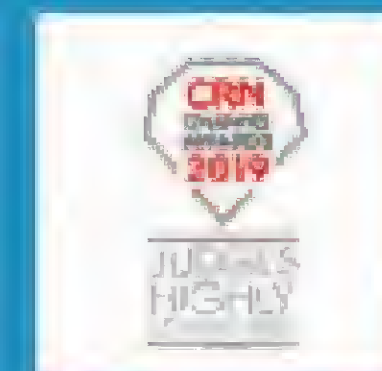


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Pluralsight's Sean Farrington



Fujitsu UK's Christian Benson

Investment in skills development is the new differentiator for business

Sean Farrington, SVP EMEA at Pluralsight and **Christian Benson**, VP and Client Managing Director at Fujitsu UK, discuss why companies must take skill development seriously...

The rate of technological advancement is exponential, speeding up as time goes by. According to Moore's Law, this is evident from the fact that the capabilities of computers double every 18 to 24 months. To put this into context, someone moving from graduation to a managerial role over a 20 year period will end up facing technology 500,000 times more powerful than the day they started working.

This poses a challenge for businesses, as keeping up with the pace of change is vital in order to remain competitive. Research from Fujitsu found that the majority (73%) of business leaders believe that embracing new technology is vital to future success. However, a lack of technology talent is hampering efforts to keep up with advancements, with Indeed, a world-leading job site, finding that a lack of skilled employees is leading to slower innovation and product development, and negatively affecting company revenues.

To keep up with the ongoing, rapid pace of change in

technology, organisations must therefore look at the potential of existing employees and develop the skills and expertise of technologists in-house as a way to address the imbalance between the demand and supply for talent.

“More than just an employee benefit, workplace learning is now a commercial imperative”

Why traditional training methods don't always work

More than just an employee benefit, workplace learning is now a commercial imperative. Businesses must keep their employees equipped with the latest skills, aligned to business needs, in order to compete with their peers and meet market demand.

While traditional methods, such as classroom based training, have long been used to train employees, many businesses are finding these methods ineffective. With each employee being unique, coming to their role with their own learning techniques, skill levels and areas of expertise, a 'one size fits all' approach to technology skill development is unlikely to work. With traditional training, organisations are at risk of perpetuating their skills gap, and subsequently

being left unable to embrace new technologies and effectively support customers.

Forward-thinking companies, on the other hand, are moving towards an approach which has been found to be much more effective. On-demand, digital courses, tailorable to each specific employee with individual learning pathways, are an efficient tool that fosters engagement in learning and keeps employees working towards business goals. Available on cloud-based platforms, employees can access courses whenever suits them best and choose how they learn - be it in bite-sized chunks or dedicated hours - ensuring they don't have to wait until a formal training session is organised to develop new skills.

This is the preferred approach of Fujitsu. With its global client base, the business found that customer demands were changing, and there was a business need to reskill its workforce to continue delivering high standards of service and counsel and close the skills gap. Fujitsu was determined to become more agile and rather than investing in a one-size-fits-all method of training, it opted for a more tailored approach using Pluralsight to develop six different job-specific learning pathways for UK employees to take. By working with technology experts, Fujitsu could ensure learning pathways were matched to the needs of different teams and could easily be adapted when new requirements arose.

Tailored skills assessments and pathways

Today, businesses who out-compete their peers are those who have the actionable data and insights at their disposal to make fast and accurate decisions. Like many others, Fujitsu has found that investment in skill development via cloud-based technology platforms is a robust strategy to keep up with technological change and meet customer demands.

Fujitsu can monitor and identify where skills gaps exist, use this data to understand where up-skilling is required and implement bespoke learning pathways to ensure that training is relevant, strategic and efficient. For Fujitsu in particular, this has involved a focus on AWS, DevOps, Security and Agile software programmes, which have all been dropped into online channels for specific employees to focus their development.

Moreover, it's critical that this data is measurable if a training programme is to be judged effectively or if leaders are to understand if a skills gap has been closed. This digital-first approach can provide in-depth analytics to track the

progress of employees and quantify how new skills are supporting the company's larger objectives

Impacting company culture

Investment in skill development, however, is also a sign of trust in a workforce. Empowering team members to take control of their own development and providing the tools so they can better themselves not only boosts morale and performance, but it increases engagement with business strategy and direction. In fact, research from Harvard Business Review found that 71% of employers believe that high levels of employee engagement is one of the most likely factors to bring business success.

While there's no blanket approach for employee empowerment, Fujitsu has found that it can encourage self-learning by supporting employees with setting up their own social learning groups. This has allowed them to share their knowledge, increase curiosity and ultimately foster a culture of continuous learning and growth.

Future-proofing the organisation


As the rate of technological change continues to increase, skill development must be focused on equipping teams with the tools and abilities that the future will demand.

What's concerning, however, is that research from Fujitsu has found that nearly half (44%) of leaders fear that their organisation will miss out on the benefits of new technologies in the future because they haven't planned for them.

Although the fast pace of development in fields like AI makes planning for the future difficult, this should not discourage businesses from working with experts today to equip employees with the skills that will help them maintain their competitive edge in the future.

Investing in developing skills such as DevOps and cybersecurity, for instance, helps to future-proof an organisation and its employees as they become more prevalent.

Clearly, the pace of technological change poses a significant challenge for most organisations, but with flexible, comprehensive, up-to-date and data-driven training methods in place, it is possible to embrace these changes and empower team members to upskill quickly and effectively.

As a result, organisations can feel confident that they will be able to continue meeting customer demands, offering quality products and services and remain competitive. 

“Empowering team members to take control of their own development boosts morale and performance”



How IoT is saving the social housing sector

Nick Sacke, Head of IoT and Products at Comms365, looks at the ways in which IoT can be used to create smarter, safer social housing...

As the demand increases for more affordable social housing across the UK, the pressure is on for social housing associations to adapt to a dynamic landscape. Accessibility, rising maintenance costs and tenant safety are just some of the challenges facing both housing associations and their tenants. The opportunity for IoT technology in social housing can be transformative, with the potential to make developments safer, more energy-efficient, and cheaper to run.

Organisations and consumers are already implementing smart technology into their offices and homes – and social housing associations (HA) aren't far behind. There are several pilot projects being rolled out by HAs, and the initial results are encouraging. However, despite common operational challenges across the sector, not one technology solution fits all scenarios. This means that stakeholder education and various considerations need to be addressed in the planning phase before the work can begin. Head of IoT and Products at Comms365, Nick Sacke, looks at the ways in which IoT can be used to create smarter, safer social housing.

Maintenance and resource allocation

According to Gartner, by 2020 utilities will be the largest use case of IoT endpoints, totalling 1.17 billion in 2019, increasing 17% in 2020. The integration of smart sensors within residential properties will inevitably boost this adoption.

Smart sensors can be used to measure and gather data from numerous property management parameters including temperature, humidity, carbon dioxide levels, noise and movement. This data can then be shared with providers who can feed it into the network, benefiting tenants who can control their bills through increased controls and access, and HAs, who can use the data insights for predictive maintenance, allowing for more effective resource allocation. For example, sensors can identify whether humidity levels are creating an environment for damp and mould, which if left, would incur repair costs and potentially cause health issues, leading to more expenses over time. But this insight isn't just limited to tenant spaces; IoT devices can alert to incorrect parking across emergency exits and fire lanes, bin fill levels and lighting loss. In turn, this implementation enables HAs to become responsible landlords,


providing improvements to tenants' homes and the quality of their day-to-day life.

Implementation

The greater the volume of data harvested from individual properties, the more trending and predictive analysis can be undertaken, leading to enhanced accuracy and forecasting, combined with new data visualisation techniques.

A key consideration in the deployment of multiple IoT devices is that they are able to utilise a common communications network infrastructure to connect and deliver data to applications in the cloud. Standards in Low Power Wide Area Networks such as LoRaWAN and Narrowband IoT have emerged globally, and are helping device manufacturers to produce products that conform to these communications protocols, making large deployments easier to deploy and manage in large geographic areas, enabling a holistic view across estates of devices. If these standards and methods are followed, overheads for device management and reporting can be minimised.

Another important consideration is cultural acceptance of 'smart' technology in the home. Despite the operational and cost efficiencies of IoT, for tenants, privacy is a prime concern. The idea of 24/7 monitoring can make tenants nervous which may affect their willingness to embrace or approve the use of these devices in their homes. This, therefore, is an area that HAs need to be mindful of and ensure they are addressing in the planning phase in order to pre-empt any tenant-requested adjustments.

With the demand for more energy-efficient housing on the rise and the latest government green standard for new build homes already in place, the expectation for more intelligent homes is increasing. We, therefore, predict that in the years to follow, IoT-based property services will be much more agile, responsive and offer a dynamic set of services that are more tailored to tenants' needs. Properties that are better managed and highly cost-efficient to run result in happier, safer tenants. The vision and objective for this type of technology intervention is to allow housing stock to connect seamlessly to facilities management and operations, exchange relevant data for insight and action, and deliver safer, smarter, economical and environmentally conscious social housing. 



How SD-WAN is transforming retail

Michael Cabra, Senior Product Manager at Cybera, looks at why retailers of all sizes should be investing in technologies such as SD-WAN...

When it comes to shopping in-store, today's consumers expect a truly connected experience that lets them switch between physical and digital channels – without missing a beat.

Little wonder then that smart retailers are striving to combine their physical and online retail platforms to serve customers better and integrate the ease of the online shopping experience into a physical store location. They're also exploiting new technologies, like IoT and virtual reality, to deliver fluid, interactive, immersive and personalised in-store shopping experiences that truly resonate with customers.

Making this all happen, however, requires a flexible network foundation that enables any retailer, regardless of size, to realise the positive impacts of digital transformation in a fast and affordable way. And that's where a software-defined wide area network (SD-WAN) can help.

Making the move to SD-WAN

To compete with online mega-sellers and deliver against the fast-evolving expectations of today's digital consumers, retailers need to boost their IT agility and expand their use of mobile technologies.

That's no easy task, especially for smaller retailers who find their complicated legacy networks are hampering their ability to unleash digital innovation and compete in an increasingly dynamic world.

Fortunately, SD-WAN platforms make it easy to simplify networks, integrate each and every store, and initiate fast and reliable access to both on-premise and cloud-based applications. Paving the way for digital transformation initiatives that can prove pivotal – especially for smaller footprint retailers.

Whether that's initiating new in-store digital technologies and enabling automation and more agile business processes that level the playing field with larger competitors. Or managing and monitoring remote sites and inventory to increase profitability and enable the faster collection of customer online orders in-store.

Securing retail innovation

We're living in an era when a high profile cybersecurity breach can prove costly and have a big impact on brand reputation. So, when it comes to the distributed network, smaller retailers need to be certain that IT teams can cope with new digital initiatives and changing customer demands without compromising on security.


The good news is that with the right SD-WAN platform in place, IT teams can leverage a single set of adaptive security strategies – such as active network monitoring, next generation firewalls and secure payment systems – to ensure the business and its data is protected.

They're also free to focus on higher order security functions; for example, isolating certain types of application traffic into logical networks to ensure payment data is kept separate from guest Wi-Fi traffic.

Utilising these sophisticated cybersecurity methods and technologies, even the smallest retailer can take an integrated security approach that both streamlines digital transformation efforts and makes it easy to mitigate against any associated security risks.

The store of the future is physical

Tech-led retail is going mainstream and smaller retailers will need to keep up with consumers, for whom the boundaries between the digital and physical worlds are blurring. The fast-paced adoption of augmented reality, virtual reality, beacons, 3D printing and touchscreen kiosks means retail brands need to embrace a digital strategy fast – or risk being left to play catchup with the rest of the market.

Investing in technologies like SD-WAN can help redress the balance for smaller retailers that want to initiate tech-driven stores. Whether that's enabling customers to sign-in the moment they walk through the door and enjoy a personalised shopping journey that's packed with recommendations and offers. Or initiating in-store tech that makes shopping efficient, differentiated and seamless. 



Organisations still haven't got the patch management memo

Tim Brown, VP of Security at SolarWinds MSP, looks at how a renewed focus on security basics is necessary to keep businesses safe from attack...

New cybersecurity defence systems promise to keep us safe from increasingly sophisticated hacking techniques. AI and machine learning solutions are touted as the future, reacting in real time and without human intervention to the latest attacks that cybercriminals devise. A simple rules-based defence is no longer enough to protect valuable data – instead attacks will be discovered and prevented automatically by smart defences that operate independently and only need oversight from humans.

It's a compelling story. How can businesses ever cope with a complex and ever-changing security landscape when the enemy has all the latest tools at their disposal? Surely they need the latest defences to cope with the latest attacks.

However, most businesses are a long way from needing the kind of security sophistication that would warrant help from AI. For them to apply this level of security would be like employing Terminator-style cyborg guards to protect a building with busted locks. Wouldn't it make more sense, and be cheaper, to fix the locks first?

The importance of patch management

A patch is more than just a collection of bug fixes and code to repair vulnerabilities – every patch divides a community of software users into haves and have-nots. The division is between those who have applied the patch and those who have failed to do so. For hackers, it's far easier to go after those systems that have not been patched. It's like the old joke about two hunters being chased by a hungry bear. "I don't have to outrun the bear," says one hunter to the other, "I just have to outrun you."

Just like the bear, cybercriminals are far more likely to target those who have fallen behind in their patch management. They even have a handy list based on the latest software fixes that gives them the best way to target them. Published patch and release notes – commonly used by hackers as part of their recon before building an attack – explain which vulnerabilities have been solved, giving hackers clues as to how unpatched systems can be compromised. Patch management is basic cyberhygiene and should be followed by everyone – not just

businesses. Our research, performed in partnership with IDC, found that only 27% of businesses surveyed cite patch management as part of their security setup.


Getting patch management right

Patch management needs to be at the top of anyone's security priority list. It's a necessary part of security – it's called cyberhygiene for good reason. It is an everyday mundane task that's absolutely critical.

Patch management can be done manually, but this is only viable for the smallest of businesses. After all, it's not just desktop PCs and laptops that need to be kept up to date, but tablets, printers, servers, smartphones, and myriad IoT devices. Larger businesses will need either software to help manage this, or the help of an outsourced managed services provider to look after IT problems. In fact, an inability to keep up with patches is probably a good indicator that outside help is needed.

A patch management program is more than just the software used to manage what needs to be patched, but is a combination of product, people, and software. Some systems simply can't be patched due to compatibility or other reasons, or can only be patched during certain times as uptime is crucial. A patch management program will measure and understand the risk of particular systems being unpatched, highlight the most important patches and take care of them first.

Once patch management policies and methods are in place, then decisions can be made on what patches should be applied. It's not a bad idea to apply every available patch, but once an IT team has a better understanding of a specific situation, a judgement can be made on whether the risk to the business is worth the risk of installing a patch. If it fixes a very minor vulnerability but could mean major disruption if something goes wrong, maybe it's right to delay it until its effects are better known.

Even if some patches are delayed, then the business will be in far better shape with a patch management program than without, putting themselves way ahead of the bear – and its other potential targets. 

Number CRUNCHING

Here are some of the most interesting stats and facts from the tech channel...

47%

Around half (47%) of IT Managed Service Providers (MSPs) admit to investing in cyber security products only after being hacked, according to new research by ESET.



16 years

Sophos research shows that 31% of companies trading for more than 16 years are not fully aware of the specific cloud services used by their workers.

£174k

Failed ecommerce projects result in direct-to-consumer retailers wasting 174k in 2019, according to Greenlight Commerce's latest report.

57%

Despite the younger generation admitting to being influenced by personalised online offers, a shocking 57% say that the offers they receive online are 'mostly irrelevant', says YouGov.



18-24 year olds

New Gekko research has found that despite 70% of consumers saying they are concerned about the impact of online shopping, the supposedly woke generation – 18-24 year olds – care far less about the eco-footprint of online purchases than older shoppers.



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PCR's guide to tech distribution

Whether you're a retailer or reseller looking to work with the right distributor for your business, or a vendor seeking out the most fitting company to push your products through the channel, here is **PCR's** annual guide to the biggest and brightest tech and IT distributors...



What products/services do you specialise in?

Our focus is on selling solutions, not products or services. By buying bundled solutions from us, you gain access to a wide range of solution design, technical and support services not available from other distributors.

Why should businesses pick you as their distie of choice?

We offer a trusted, innovative service that is focused, technically assured with collaborative information that is tailored for the customer's needs. Our influence in the technology space is dedicated to being the agile distributor of choice.

Who do you want to work with more in 2020 and how can they get in touch?

CMS Distribution's technologies cover a wide range of categories within the software, hardware, and consumer markets. We are always looking to connect new technology to new customers and would be delighted to discuss your needs today. Visit our website at cmsdistribution.com, email urvisha.patel@cmsdistribution.com, or call +44 20 8962 2500.



What products/services do you specialise in?

Dynamode Limited is one of Europe's leading manufacturers of networking, LAN infrastructure hardware together with an expansive range of next-generation peripheral products utilising the latest, high-performance bus hardware, hardware containment and data centre solutions including server and networking enclosures, power distribution hardware and intelligent UPS systems for all sizes of installations.

Why should businesses pick you as their distie of choice?

Dynamode Limited has decades of expertise in knowing what customers want with regards to the latest computing and related technologies at a cost-effective price point. Dynamode distributors enjoy healthy sales margins, a wide choice of products for their

customer base and pre and post-sales support, all of which are based in the UK. Dynamode offers excellent marketing materials, promotional pricing for its range of products and the all important product training for Dynamode products – helping distributors and resellers to get the most of offering our vast product range.

Who do you want to work with more in 2020 and how can they get in touch?

Dynamode Limited has built up an excellent distribution and reseller network in the UK and Europe. There are huge opportunities for new and upcoming distributors of all sizes, from the small companies to the largest multinational distributions companies – Dynamode has the experience, pricing and product solutions to cater for all types of companies. Offering for example the latest Dynamode USB-C solutions to cater for Windows and Mac computers, means that Dynamode is keen to move into the Apple distribution network as all our solutions are of course Apple Mac and Apple mobile solution compliant, offering a real alternative to mainstream devices which are normally double the cost price. Visit dynamode.com, email acc5@dynamode.com or call 0845 3752023 / 01923 244438.

exertis

What products/services do you specialise in?

Our retail division provides a wide range of consumer technology products from market leading and emerging brands. Our categories include premium audio and TV, consumer electronics, gaming, smart tech, gadgets and accessories, SDAs, commodity IT products and own-brand. We provide specialist services designed specifically for the different types of customers we serve: online, storefront, omni, grocer, telco, utility and DIY. These include: drop ship (reaching 1.6 million homes in the UK) and logistical services; category management; in-store engagement; merchandise and display; promotional bundles; packaging and design; pop-up stores; digital platforms and marketing and PR services.

Why should businesses pick you as their distie of choice?

Exertis has a long-established and proven track record in retail with 51.1% of the addressable market (Context). We are the leading distributor in the gaming market, number one in smart tech, experts in premium audio and offer the widest range of accessories for our customers. We provide a variety of routes to markets for our vendors, establish new outlets for our brands and enable our etailers/retailers to expand their portfolios into new market areas. In addition, our people are our key differentiator, experts in their categories, willing to go the extra mile and make extraordinary happen for our customers.

Who do you want to work with more in 2020 and how can they get in touch?

We want to work more with all of our customers enabling them to adapt to the changing behaviour of consumers who demand an omnichannel approach to retail. There are clear opportunities in the smart tech market to work with CEDIA members and installers that can help homeowners to embrace the advantages that the connected home can offer consumers in terms of energy savings, security and convenience. We look for vendors that can drive consumer growth in any of the technologies in which we operate. Visit Exertis' website at exertis.co.uk or call the distributor on 01256 707070.



What products/services do you specialise in?

The Hama company mission statement is 'to provide an accessory for every piece of consumer electronics hardware on the market', and that's precisely what we do! With over 9,400 products across categories such as audio, mobile, TV, smart home, photo and home & living, we offer retailers a one-stop solution for their store. We are not about just selling the one mobile charger or cable, instead we will create a complete sell in solution tailored to your store, be it for a counter display, a wall display or a free-stand floor unit with a range of relevant accessories.

Why should businesses pick you as their distie of choice?

Our job doesn't end at providing the products. Hama UK continues to offer in-depth product, sales and marketing

support through our experienced office-based staff and on-the-road teams long after the goods have been delivered. Whether it's creating instore point of sale, social media promotion, product training sessions or customer service support, Hama UK is always happy to help, with individually assigned sales managers offering store-specific support and advice. Whilst encouraging innovation and embrace advancements in technologies and designs, Hama UK also appreciates the timeless value of good old-fashioned customer service.

Who do you want to work with more in 2020 and how can they get in touch?

At Hama UK there is only ever one type of customer we pursue, and that is a happy one. National department store, small family-run independent, school, hotel, office block, or other type of organisation, we are happy to pop by and discuss your needs. We are passionate about accessories because we recognise that these often hold healthy profit margins for many retail businesses. By demonstrating the benefits of stocking and marketing appropriate accessories in store, we are looking to help retailers overcome the current period of uncertainty. Visit Hama UK's website at <https://uk.hama.com/>, email info.uk@hama.com, or call 0333 123 4262.

MENTOR

What products do you specialise in?

Since 1991, Mentor Distribution has been a trade-only distributor of IT and AV equipment. We are an authorised distributor for some of the world's leading brands including NEC, Iiyama, AG Neovo, Asus, Chief, Humanscale and Metalicon.

Why should businesses pick you as their distie of choice?

We are an innovative company that is at the forefront of the latest technologies. Our team has a wealth of experience, enabling us to offer an exceptional service. Our current portfolio of products include display screens (desktop monitors, public display products,

spectraview (colour correction) display products, medical DICOM display products, 4K displays, CCTV monitors, touch screen monitors, privacy monitors and hard glass monitors), servers, motherboards, monitor arms, mounting solutions and other interactive products. In recent years, we are proud to have expanded into manufacturing our own touchscreens and fully integrated privacy monitors to ensure we can continue to satisfy our customers' needs for the very latest technology. We see 2020 as a big year for our fully integrated privacy monitors.

Who do you want to work with more in 2020 and how can they get in touch?

You can get in touch with us by emailing sales@mentor-distribution.com or calling us on 01462 814000. You can also visit our website at mentor-distribution.com



What products do you specialise in?

M2M Direct is a specialist memory and storage distributor offering information-led, solutions-based added value service. M2M works with best-in-class vendors such as Intel, Samsung, Micron Technology, Crucial, Lexar, Seagate, G Skill and SK Hynix. We have carefully curated a specialised portfolio selecting the latest, most disruptive and innovative technologies from the best manufacturers in the world. Hence, we have one of the most comprehensive offerings of product lines in the industry including memory modules, portable media, solid state drives, hard drives, optical drives, processors, graphic cards, and enterprise server, storage and software products. M2M specialises in a variety of vertical markets including: data centre enterprise storage and upgrades, system integrators & server solutions, corporate reseller workplace, security and encryption, PC gaming and etail.

Why should businesses pick you as their distie of choice?

M2M Direct provides a consultative sales model, providing customers with the correct product for the required solution. We successfully follow a vertically based distribution model, with our specialist portfolio fulfilling all potential requirements within the channel. The M2M customer services team tailor their support according to your needs. M2M has a 98.9% order accuracy with a next day delivery service as the standard protocol. We also offer drop ship white label when required with fully integrated EDI solutions connected and available to new customers. Our team is expertly trained and has the support of world class manufacturers to find the best solution for your customers. We have competitive pricing with flexible credit terms.

Who do you want to work with more in 2020 and how can they get in touch?

Alongside market trend, M2M is expanding further into the cloud and managed data services. Throughout 2020, we would like to expand our customer base to specialised corporate and VAR resellers servicing these markets. Contact us on 0208 676 6067 at sales@m2m-direct.co.uk, or visit m2m-direct.co.uk.



What products/services do you specialise in?

QBS Distribution Consumer provides a range of software from vendors such as Kaspersky, BitDefender, Panda, F-Secure and NordVPN. Providing best of breed software for security, vpn, data recovery and productivity.

Why should businesses pick you as their distie of choice?

New for partners is our partner programme allowing premier partners to obtain exclusive pricing, products and marketing aids to support your business positioning the latest consumer software.

Who do you want to work with more in 2020 and how can they get in touch?

We'd welcome a conversation with any resellers targeting the consumer software market and addressing the cybersecurity threat to home users. Our partner programme is tailor-made to support you! Plus any publishers of consumer software looking for a trusted route to market and a distribution partner dedicated to this area of the market to work in partnership. Call Paul on 0330 101 1000, email salesteam@qbs.co.uk or visit qbsdistribution.com/consumer.



What products/services do you specialise in?

QBS Distribution Enterprise provides the market-leading software delivery platform. Our team of licensing specialists take huge pride in delivering a fast, reliable and responsive service. Through our platform we enable software publishers and channel resellers to increase efficiency and achieve growth. Providing specialist software services for sourcing, business development, marketing, and technical expertise. Key publishers include JetBrains, Smartsheet, TechSmith, Acunetix, Bluebeam, Vyond, Paessler, SolarWinds ITSM, Intel Software, Nitro Software, Smartbear, TeamViewer, BrowserStack, OpenText,

Sharegate, OPSWAT, InVision, Docusign, iStorage, and Paessler.

Why should businesses pick you as their distie of choice?

At QBS, we pride ourselves on our customer service excellence. Providing fast, reliable and responsive service to help customers and publishers to optimise the procurement process to reduce the cost of fulfilment. A software specialist with over 33 years of experience. Key services include, sourcing globally, range management, and pro-active development of emerging technologies.

Who do you want to work with more in 2020 and how can they get in touch?

We'd welcome a conversation with any resellers that are finding it time-consuming to source specialist software or want to review how we can assist in helping them optimise the procurement process to reduce their cost of fulfilment. Plus any publishers of enterprise software looking for a trusted route to market and a distribution partner dedicated to this area of the market to work in partnership. Call 020 8733 7103, email sales@qbsd.co.uk, or visit qbsdistribution.com.



What products/services do you specialise in?

Simms is a specialist distributor of memory and storage technology. In partnership with world-class manufacturers Intel, Micron, Kingston, Crucial, Innodisk and ATP Simms offers the UK's most comprehensive line up of memory products for a wide range of computing systems. Each technology is specifically designed to deliver optimum levels of performance, quality and reliability for their intended environment.

Why should businesses pick you as their distie of choice?

Aside from a large stock holding and access to the most

competitive pricing Simms is the UK's authority on memory technology. Now in our 30th year, Simms is well versed in helping customers navigate supply complexities and technology transitions in this fast-evolving and extremely cyclical industry. The Simms team boast over 270 years collective industry experience helping clients to effectively manage data through world-class memory and storage solutions. Simms people are always passionate about delivering an outstanding customer experience and pride themselves on their ability to communicate quickly and effectively.

Who do you want to work with more in 2020 and how can they get in touch?

Simms is proud to be the partner of choice to the UK's leading value-added resellers, system integrators and original equipment manufacturers and welcome the opportunity to help more of these organisations select, source and supply memory technology on time and in budget regardless of market conditions. Whether you are placing memory in the datacentre, workplace or at the edge get in touch today to discuss how we can help you get the best from your server, workstation, laptop or embedded computing project. Call us on 01622 852800, email at sales@simms.co.uk or visit us at simms.co.uk.



SMITHIE
UK Ltd

What products/services do you specialise in?

Here at Smithie UK we specialise in IT hardware storage, client

and enterprise SSD, client and server memory and mechanical hard drives along with a range of optical drives everything from basic DVD writer up to a Blu-Ray writer. We also have an extensive range of LED lighting.

Why should businesses pick you as their distie of choice?

We have a large onsite warehouse, for next day delivery. Within the sales team we have over 100 years' experience between us in the trade. We will offer you an experienced and dedicated account manager to oversee your buying needs, strong and direct vendor relationships for additional market knowledge, and excellent RMA facilities and warranty.

Who do you want to work with more in 2020 and how can they get in touch?

One of our friendly team will be happy to hear from you soon! Visit smithieit.co.uk, call 01256 844028 or email us at sales@smithieuk.com.



What products/services do you specialise in?

Spire Technology specialises in a wide range of quality PCs, laptops, software, components and peripherals at competitive prices with an equally high level of service. Spire's breadth of products spans across multiple, well-known brands with products from Adata, Akasa, AKRacing, AMD, Antec, ASROCK, ASUS, be quiet!, Buffalo, BullGuard, Corsair, HP, Intel, Kingston, Lenovo, Microsoft, Nvidia, Palit, PNY, Sandberg, Seagate, TP-Link, WD, Xtrfy and more.

Why should businesses pick you as their distie of choice?

All businesses benefit from their own dedicated account manager when working with Spire. Dealing with all aspects of

managing your account and purchasing process, your dedicated account manager will work in partnership with you to build your business from working within your budgets and requirements, to recommending new technologies, products and upcoming brands to help boost your product portfolio and increase your own customer base. Spire is a friendly, approachable yet highly professional company that continuously strives to improve its customer's experiences. In focusing on continuous employee training and offering the best products at competitive prices, Spire has built up a strong reputation and loyal following within the industry.

Who do you want to work with more in 2020 and how can they get in touch?

Moving forward in 2020, Spire's main focus will be on continuing our ongoing support for the channel in bringing the latest technology from an array of vendor partners to our customers. We pride ourselves on our customer service and our ability to meet the needs of the channel and it's ever changing landscape. We are constantly researching and implementing new ways to aid in the growth and profitability within the industry and will continue to do so this year. For those who are interested in forming a new partnership with Spire, please feel free to get in touch via our website - spire.co.uk, email us at sales@spire.co.uk, or telephone us on 01202 828 444.



What products/services do you specialise in?

Target specialises in offering PC components, desktop PCs, laptops, networking, CCTV and security, mobile spares and associated products from a wide variety of global brands. With new ranges that include gaming peripherals from Marvo, enterprise networking from Ubiquiti, an exclusive range of home and business monitors from piXL as well as an extended range of Evo Labs retail-packaged keyboards, mice and desktop bundles, our portfolio is growing and growing. We pride ourselves on offering the products our customers want, at the best possible prices.

Why should businesses pick you as their distie of choice?

We're genuinely different. We believe that our success depends on our customers' success, and this shapes everything we do. It's encapsulated in our vision: "Seeing the world through our partners' eyes, and making it better, simpler and more profitable place for them".

Who do you want to work with more in 2020 and how can they get in touch?

After a record 2019, we're keen to continue the success this year. We work with thousands of resellers of all shapes and sizes, across all areas of the channel. Our only requirement as a distributor is that you are a genuine IT trade business. If you have the requirement for a great range of products from leading brands at market-leading prices, with the support that will help your businesses flourish, visit targetcomponents.co.uk or call 01977 739 300.



WESTCOAST

What products/services do you specialise in?

Westcoast are the UK's largest privately owned IT business and a fast growing distributor and services provider. As the UK's leading provider of HP, HPE, Apple, Samsung, Lenovo, Microsoft, Lexmark as well as every brand of Ink & Toner and a range of complimentary products/accessories – Westcoast are well placed to provide all types of reseller with their core IT requirements. With a range of services that can be 'attached to the box' – Westcoast's flexibility and agility still impresses – and with a new 341k sqft warehouse, no other UK distributor has more space to deliver for you.

Why should businesses pick you as their distie of choice?

Unrelenting excellence – Westcoast are the leading distributor for all the brands we sell because we have those limited number of brands allowing our people better knowledge without referring to an internal expert. Our systems are tailored to assist with each of these brands and our overall flexibility allows us to tailor our approach to your requirements better than any competitor. We are hungry for growth and our value add is a relentless focus on removing cost from the supply chain.

Who do you want to work with more in 2020 and how can they get in touch?

Every customer is welcome:

- New brands that want a better capability into leading retailers;
- Born in the cloud resellers needing more support for their Microsoft Azure billing;
- Contract printers wanting to outsource their warehouse;
- Managed service providers wanting to engage in DaaS;
- Enterprise system integrators wanting to build their own channel model
- Mobile resellers wanting to take advantage of 5G opportunities.

Visit us at westcoast.co.uk, email our new business manager at james.macbeth@westcoast.co.uk or phone 0118 9126000.

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TOUGH TECH

With consumers demanding devices that last longer, and businesses looking to equip their field workers with more tough-yet-lightweight products, **Laura Barnes** looks at how the rugged tech market is evolving...

DOOGEE's S68 Pro rugged smartphone is waterproof, dustproof and is high-temperature resistant

As more and more consumers buy smartphones, tablets and laptop devices, they want to keep them functioning as long as possible, whether that's by putting the big brand devices in ruggedised cases, or buying a device specifically manufactured to withstand extreme conditions.

This demand for protecting devices for longer also boosts the rugged accessory market, as tech users don't want to buy accessories all over again when their smartphone survive falling into water but their earphones or portable charger doesn't. And as the younger generation use more and more tech in school, demand has grown for rugged devices that can handle being constantly dropped, thrown into backpacks and can also be easily cleaned.

With all this in mind, it's easy to see how the rugged tech market is growing, and that's before we get into the demand for more tough-yet-lightweight products needed for various types of field workers. ASUS is one company that has been serving both the education and business markets with its rugged devices.

"ASUS has a heritage in rugged devices. We were one of the first to launch an education rugged device with the original C202 in 2017," Nathaniel Ayling, UK PR manager (systems), at ASUS UK, tells *PCR*. "Since then, ASUS's rugged Chrome range has grown to include, touch and flip devices, as well as larger 14-inch rugged devices and a rugged Chrome tablet, which has been especially well received with front line workers.

"We work closely with our end users and customers to find out what they need the devices for and what they need protection against, with a broad range of quality products we have been in the unique position to provide a survivable device that fits the form factor and performance needs of any business or educational institute."

Allen He, global brand director for DOOGEE, says the brand has also seen demand from industry professionals such as builders, plumbers, police officers and mechanics wanting a sturdier phone that will not break. However, He says it's the consumer demand that's really taken off, with the brand's rugged mobile device range increasing every year.

"I have noticed that the consumer rugged phone market has doubled from 2017-2020. I believe this growth is down to more people taking part in outdoor activities, a requirement for extra back-up phones, and there being less innovation in normal consumer phones like Huawei, Apple and Samsung or the innovation of these brands not being of interest to many people."

The device demand has helped boost rugged accessories as well, with Hama UK being one brand that has seen this benefit. "Hama UK has always stocked a selection of high-durability and weather-proof accessories as part of our extended range," Ben Jones, senior product manager at Hama UK, tells *PCR*. "However, as tech becomes more and more portable and our lives become increasingly



Rugged market

L-R: Hama UK's Soldier-S rugged Bluetooth speaker – which is ideal for outdoor use, and the ASUS rugged Chromebook C202 designed for the education sector

digitised, consumers are investing much more than just cash in their smartphone or tablet. Reflected in our own introduction of lines such as 'Rugged' smartphone cases, Soldier Bluetooth speakers and Extreme Kevlar cables, the market for reliable device protection and accessories has experienced sure and steady growth over the past couple of years, largely due to the soaring daily demands on our tech.

"IPX ratings are also becoming a vital spec, especially as far as travel-conscious or outdoor-loving consumer-types are concerned, as tech is carried with us at all times whatever the weather and with a growing expectation to endure."

Rugged retailers

So if you're not already stocking rugged products in your store, why should you? ASUS UK's Ayling insists there are a number of reasons for ruggedised devices to be stocked by retailers.

"With the ever increasing ease of adoption of tech by young children, a ruggedised solution is great to allow them to do homework and take their first steps into online learning and life without having to worry as a parent about expensive devices becoming damaged," he suggests.

"It is also becoming more prevalent that individuals are looking to involve tech in their work on site. Many single contractors, from builders, to carers to cleaners need a rugged portable solution to carry out invoicing, power card readers or schedule on the fly. By stocking these rugged devices in retail, it will make life much easier for the back bone of Britain's self-employed and sole traders to get access to high quality reliable tech."

Hama UK's Jones says that accessories in general are always a great investment for the retailer. "While selling hardware at its higher price point often sounds appealing, it is accessories which will provide a much greater margin and return for the business in the long-term.

"Modern lifestyle choices, with growing focus towards a more active, outdoor lifestyle, in addition to the rising influence of 'Camo' and military styles on the UK fashion runway, suggest that rugged tech and accessories are becoming as much of a fashion statement as a practicality and would not be a wasted investment for any retail store."

DOOGEE's He agrees that there is a big potential market that's growing very fast, year-on-year. "To date, there hasn't been a massive

amount of marketing around rugged phones as most people tend to know the main manufacturers like Apple and Samsung. With more awareness, we anticipate yet more growth in the coming years," says He, who also points out that rugged phones have to pass more tests than standard smartphones such as ip68 and ip69k and achieve certifications like MIL-STD810G. An appealing USP that ensures the phones are tougher and more durable with less returns likely.

And for those retailers who have customers looking for devices with more specific features, He explains that some of these extra functionality include the ability to work in extreme temperatures from -15 – 55+ degrees.

"The waterproof and dustproof rugged devices can also shoot videos under water, whilst the 6000mah – 8000mah battery and dropproof design can prove more popular than the sleeker big brand smartphones currently available on the market," He tells PCR.

Future vision

Looking ahead to what we can expect to see from the rugged tech marketing in the near future, Ayling tells PCR: "Rugged devices have a very trademark look and they obviously prioritise function and protection over aesthetics.

"With the advances made every day in our material sciences and with the release of new rugged models, the biggest change to come will be devices that maintain their MIL STD testing credentials whilst being lighter, more portable and much more visually pleasing."

Jones believes that as a growing range of rugged tech and accessories continue to feed onto the marketplace, the development of new resistant materials is likely to play a key role in the future potential of this sector as physical capabilities struggle to keep up with consumer expectations.

"Devices, such as smartphones, are being taken to harsher environments than ever before; up mountains, underwater and across temperature extremes as R&D teams such as ours constantly strive to advance and integrate emerging materials in the creation of an ultra-durable product," says Jones.

DOOGEE's He agrees, adding: "I envision rugged phones becoming a powerful tool for the people who need it in their particular industry or for their hobbies.

"This will include new functions like infrared cameras, night vision cameras, laser measurement and satellite communications to really bring more convenience to users." 📷

APPOINTMENTS

This month's movers and shakers in the tech industry...

CMS Distribution

CMS Distribution has appointed Huw Jones as its new chief business officer. Having worked almost a decade at Tech Data, he joins CMS with extensive industry relevant knowledge and experience of sales leadership.

"CMS Distribution is a highly specialised, dynamic and ambitious organisation that has obvious commitment to its customers, vendors, and employees. The opportunity to be part of the team and the journey is an exciting prospect," commented Jones.

In his appointment at CMS, he will have full responsibility for sales and marketing, to continue to develop value-added opportunities that deliver growth for our customers and vendor partners.

"The director team and I are pleased to confirm the appointment of Huw Jones as chief business officer. With our ambition to expand horizons in the channel, the appointment of Huw will help expand our existing relationships and explore new vendor relationships that can continue the growth trajectory at CMS," commented Frank Salmon, CEO of CMS Distribution.



Hama UK

Following the retirement of country manager Paul Irish last month, Hama UK has announced the appointment of ex-Roberts Radio CEO Owen Watters as MD.

Watters brings with him a wealth of experience from his time served as head of the iconic British audio brand, in addition to his existing high standing within the consumer electronics industry, both likely to prove key in developing Hama's position within the UK marketplace in the coming year.

In mutual pursuit of a smooth handover, Watters has already been working alongside retiring industry veteran Paul Irish for several months, meeting with Hama UK and European teams and getting to grips with the new leadership position.

Paying homage to his predecessor and explaining his anticipation at being chosen for the role, Watters said: "Paul's leadership has cemented Hama as the leading accessories business in the UK over the last few years and I'm committed to continue his great work and to continue to treasure the core values of the business."



ASL Group

Managed-office services supplier ASL Group is strengthening its senior management team with the appointment of Duncan Forsyth as chief financial officer.

Previously the group managing director at Westcoast, Forsyth brings with him experience of being part of a team that has taken a company from a £35 million-pound turnover to a £3 billion-pound turnover. During his time at Westcoast he developed extensive relationships across the technology industry.

"As a supplier to ASL, I've observed the senior management team's approach, and success. I can see the opportunity for ASL to further expand its great position as one of the leading independent managed service providers in the UK," said Forsyth.

Mark Garius, managing director of ASL, commented on the appointment: "We've acquired three businesses in the last 12 months as well as securing investment from Primary, and we are keen to continue to grow ASL. It's important for us to maintain our high level of operations and service and the appointment of a new chief financial officer enables us to do this."



Network Group

Technology community Network Group has announced that channel heavyweight Perry Ashby has joined as chairman.

Ashby is CEO of Urban Network and former CompTIA vice chair, and will be providing insight and leadership to the Network Group and its partners.

"To say I am excited, honoured and privileged to be at the helm, to lead the Group into the next stage of its journey would be an understatement," commented Ashby. "Network Group truly is the place where forward-looking tech people come together, to improve themselves and their businesses."

Network Group currently has over 80 member companies in key geographical areas of the UK, Ireland, Channel Islands and a presence in mainland Europe.

At the start of a new decade, Ashby said he is looking forward to welcoming channel partners to the 11th annual Network Group Awards & Gala Dinner, which takes place on 30th April.



Exertis

Exertis has appointed Liz Greenwood as its UK IT director, reporting to Richard Hinds, Exertis UK&I's chief operating officer.

She will have responsibility to continue to drive the overall service and performance improvements associated with the UK IT function. In addition, she will play a lead role in defining the company's future SAP roadmap and critically how the solution is used to deliver value across all areas of the business.

Greenwood joins from Royal Mail Group, having spent almost eight years with the company most recently as business IT director for Parcelforce Worldwide. Prior to that, she worked at Fujitsu Services for seven years in a variety of senior IT and business roles and at Siemens for five years.

"I am looking forward to the challenge of leading a very professional and talented UK IT team. It's an exciting time to be joining such an entrepreneurial business that has experienced rapid growth and undertaken a number of acquisitions in the last few years. From an IT perspective, it presents some exciting opportunities to help transform and modernise key aspects of the business that can increase productivity and provide an even better service to customers," said Greenwood.



Lenovo DCG

Giovanni Di Filippo has joined Lenovo Data Center Group (DCG) as president of Europe Middle East and Africa (EMEA). He joins to drive the business in this region and build on relationships with data center partners and customers.

Bringing a wealth of experience, Di Filippo has had various senior leadership roles, and has transformed sales organisations within international, multi-billion-dollar technology companies. Before Lenovo, he was VP of EMEA for channels, sales and strategic alliances with Riverbed Technology.

Prior to this time, he held several global vice president-level positions within SAP's global channel and sales divisions. Following a period as the MD of Central & Eastern Europe and the Gulf region for Cisco, he also went on to lead the entire CEE, CIS and Middle East region as well.

"For me, technology has the potential to do so much for the digital society if we think more about the people at the centre of it all, and encourage greater collaboration – how technology should work smarter for everyone, how it can truly enable us to make everyday life easier, even how it can help solve some of humanity's greatest challenges," commented Di Filippo.



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Retail is changing, and so should your window

Gekko Field Marketing's MD, **Daniel Todaro**, offers up some sage advice for retailers looking to entice more shoppers through their doors...

The high street saw footfall drop by -2.5% for the five weeks from 24th November to 28th December 2019. Coupled with the ONS report that GDP was flat (0.0%) in Q4 2019 with services (+0.1) and construction (+0.5%) growing but production falling (-0.8%), the need to capture the attention of your passers by is increasingly important and for all the right reasons, especially if there's a competitor in the vicinity offering consumers choice in your category.

We all know that the experience a customer receives will determine their propensity to buy and perhaps become a repeat customer but the whole experience is more than customer service, it's also perception.

Walk down any major shopping street and every store is looking to draw you in through a welcoming frontage with kerb appeal to entice the shopper to enter and browse. Amazing windows, displays and the promise of more of the same inside

communicates their identity to the consumer, making you desire to be a customer.

A store front is the most cost effective marketing tool that many retailers have at their disposal. It's the silent salesperson that tells those who don't know who you are, what you sell and defines what sets you apart from the competition. It's an opportunity to set the tone for your brand and showcase the lines you stock that many may have not realised. With an effective call to action, it can communicate the way in which your potential customers can engage with you through social channels, your website or just over the phone. Should you choose this option, make sure these channels are up to date and link these to the window display to increase brand recall. If you display your number, make sure you answer the phone should customers choose to call.

I've talked many times about experience and how experiential based retail is what's winning in a flat economy. The opportunity to touch, feel and interact with the product and an ecosystem, perhaps through smart technology or a family of products, is an opportunity all retailers should be engaging with. This however, happens once you've got the shopper through the door. So let's look at what gets them noticing you and driving that increasingly more valuable commodity; footfall to your door.

Local advertising is great and if done properly will bring those much welcome customers to your store but when they arrive, what are they greeted with? Staff vaping at the door. A shabby looking window display. Old POS or vinyls on display. Poor signage...I could go on but I think you get the picture. The opportunity to create an amazing display isn't necessarily expensive neither does it require the creative direction of Selfridges. It starts with your brand, your strapline – such as Never Knowingly Undersold, Every Little Counts, Why Pay More – if you have one and continues with your range.

In last year's Retail Focus award every winner displayed a product line centre stage with dramatic staging and a clear message. This can be done in any retail environment and within a reasonable budget. Remove that old signage or expired offer, replace those broken bulbs with perhaps coloured or softer lighting. Create a backdrop that makes the products stand out and showcase the products that people want and desire in a realistic setting, one that resonates with the consumer. Whichever theme you chose, don't forget to ensure your concept is obvious to all potential consumers and not just you.


To believe that your exact same format which has been successful for decades remains relevant today as it did then, is wrong. Millennials are bored with the same format and Generation X, Z or even Alpha are not ignorant to poor retail. A belligerent approach only serves to insult your existing and potential customers. That's why they've abandoned once trusted retailers and by doing so, they are clearly making a statement which could become an opportunity for others.

From multiple retail brands to independents and pop up stores, the ones that 'get it' are doing so to great effect. Whether it be through introducing creative spaces within the store, to conducting free classes or work zones to encourage consumers to dwell and soak up the atmosphere. Retail is changing. Changing positively but perhaps not fast enough to decrease the failures

of once trusted retail brands and reduce the vacant units on our high streets.

In considering what matters to your audience, you should have a good handle on your local customer demographic and who you'd like to capture the attention of. Think what they'd like to see. Generations should feature heavily within your marketing mix, take Generation Z for example, born between 1995 and 2012, this generation is all about sustainability and living in a digital age. 54% of Gen Z would pay 10% or more on sustainable products. They are also a digital generation; it won't occur to most of them to put 'computer skills' on a CV as it will be ingrained into them as part of their education. They have also been taught what their digital data is worth; 47% would swap their data for discounts or special offers, (vs 73% of Boomers) but 20% would then restrict data to brands that fail to deliver the experience they expect. 52% say they are receptive to online ads. Don't expect these guys to be fooled by lip-service to sustainability, they are also known to check the facts and see through smoke and mirrors. However, they may be a digital generation, but they have been hitting the high street, with 43.8% saying it is their favourite way to shop with 73% happy to shop across multiple channels, so expect Gen Z to be price checking on mobile devices whilst shopping in store.

"Millennials are bored with the same format and Generation X, Z or even Alpha are not ignorant to poor retail"

With sustainability and shared responsibility in mind, is there the option to give something back by donating your window to a local charity or cause? Could your business become synonymous in your community with not only a broad product range, great customer service combined with immersive experiences but also community responsibility. The goal is to utilise the most valuable asset of all, your storefront to effectively convey a message and attract custom, in particular from new customers. It lends itself to creativity and flexibility like no other part of your store, so use it effectively to make it a positive reflection of your brand. 

Gekko is a full service field marketing agency, specialising in connecting brands with consumers in retail throughout the UK and Ireland. Find out more at www.gekko-uk.com

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Give your customers all the print performance they need and more with Brother's professional laser range. Reliable, fast and easy-to-use, these machines will always deliver perfect prints and faultless reliability to keep your customers happy.

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EVENTS

Find out what tech and retail events you should be attending in the coming months...

PCR AWARDS 2020

4th March, The Brewery, London

Save the date for the 2020 PCR Awards! We'll be back at The Brewery in Central London on 4th March to once again celebrate the very best of the UK tech and IT industry. On the night, we will recognise those that have made the biggest impact in the channel. Vendors, distributors, channel services, resellers and retailers will all be celebrated in front of a room of 500+ industry members. Guests will enjoy an unmissable night of networking and hospitality as we reflect on the achievements of the channel over the past year. What's more, for 2020 we have two brand new awards, and Strictly Come Dancing's Claudia Winkleman presenting the show.

Confirmed Awards Partners so far: HANNspree as Event Partner, AOC/MMD as Distribution Category Partner, Exertis as Entertainment Partner, CMS Distribution as Retail Category Partner, Synaxon UK as Vendor Category Partner, Tenda as Red Carpet Partner, Smithie UK as Flower Wall Partner, Zaboura as Event Partner, and QBS Distribution as Dining Room Partner.

WEARABLE TECHNOLOGY SHOW 2020

10th-11th March, The Business Design Centre, London

Now in its seventh year, WTS2020 is the biggest forum for forming partnerships and developing new business across the wearable, smart device and IoT landscape. Over 3,000 delegates, 200 speakers and 150 press will come together to exchange views, network and do business. The show floor will feature cutting edge technology attracting prosumers, distributors and buyers. Boasting eight conference tracks – in conjunction with the AVR360 Show, and Digital Healthcare Show – WTS2020 offers an unrivalled breadth and depth of content.

CLOUDFEST 2020

14th-19th March, Europa-Park, Germany

CloudFest 2020 will explore how AI helps you maximise the potential that hypervisor partnership offers. The Intelligent Cloud allows AI to manage and distribute complex workloads, with smart tools that make interoperability and scale more cost-effective and efficient. It's a tech paradigm that is coming up quickly, and CloudFest will help pave the way so you can be in the driver's seat. CloudFest will explore how the cloud industry is preparing for the AI evolution in terms of technology, oversight, economics, and morality.

NETWORK GROUP EXHIBITION AND AWARDS 2020

30th April 2020, Hilton Metropole, Brighton

Attendees can expect a packed day at exhibition with direct engagement and networking, and a Gala night to remember. Celebrating excellence with the UK's leading technology community, Network Group's 11th annual Gala & Awards will recognise the best and brightest in the channel, with all contenders nominated and voted for by Network Group members.

INFOSECURITY EUROPE 2020

2nd-4th June, Olympia, London

InfoSecurity Europe is a leading event for information and cyber security, bringing business, tech and cyber communities together to discuss and discover how best to protect companies and individuals. Meet with the world's most innovative suppliers and cyber experts, immerse yourself in hands-on tech and learn from world-renowned speakers and thought-leaders. At the conference you will get the insight and education you need to manage information and cyber risk to build resilience within complex organisations. At the exhibit, expect to grow your brand, generate sales leads and build relationships with 15,000+ of Europe's top cyber security professionals.

Top 5 Tech

Snowflake's Simon Field

The cloud data platform's UK CTO reveals the tech that has shaped his life, from the BBC Model B computer to today's wearable technology...



BBC MODEL B COMPUTER

One of the earliest pieces of technology that I remember having an impact on me was the BBC Model B computer that resulted from a collaboration between BBC and Acorn. It was the first real home computer that children had access to within schools and was really amazing for its time. We could play games on it, and develop programs on it in Basic and Assembler. I attended after school classes on it and got bitten by the bug. This was the starting point for my career within computing and where my passion grew, as I took an O-Level in Computer Studies. Using the BBC Model B, I designed and built an electronic weather station, and then wrote a program to read and analyse the data.

COMPAQ LAPTOP

When I started my first job at BT in 1991, I got my first portable computer – a Compaq laptop! So much for being portable, these were big clunky systems which looked more like a briefcase. It only had a 20MB hard-drive, but at this time that seemed like an amazing amount of storage, and was hard to fathom how you could ever fill-up all that space. The device also originated at a time where office productivity tools were still standalone and in their infancy. We used Lotus 123 for spreadsheets, and WordPerfect for word-processing.



PSION PDA

The next technology I remember that had a big productivity impact on me was the advent of Personal Digital Assistants (PDAs) and I was an early adopter with Psion 3 and 5. These were small (at that time) and nifty devices that you could fit into your pocket. It was really useful for managing your calendar, note taking during meetings, and catching up on email and even had its own touch-screen stylus and keyboard. While it was popular for a couple of years, its popularity was short-lived as mobile phone technology quickly evolved and made it legacy. Despite powerful hardware, its main undoing was its inability to integrate with other apps or devices, which would often make it difficult to synchronise items, limiting its effectiveness.

BOSE HEADPHONES

In 2003, whilst working at IBM, I was assigned to an international project and was travelling abroad extensively on several transatlantic trips. My wife bought me a set of BOSE's noise cancelling headphones for Christmas that year to help me travel in peace. They were a revelation and helped block out external sounds if I was trying to work, or otherwise get some sleep on planes. I continued to use them heavily up until last year when they finally broke. The headphones had been with me throughout all my travels which is amazing, thinking how quickly headphones often break or stop functioning today. I even got a trade-in when I replaced them!



FITBIT

I do love wearables, in particular the Fitbit, and I'm on my third one now. I wear it all the time, whether I'm in the gym or cycling, and it keeps track of all my daily activity. When you're so busy at work, and life in general, it's good to make sure that you're staying active and sleeping well. One of the nice things about Fitbit is the inclusion of a Rest API that enables me to extract the data, to analyse activity levels and heart rate during a busy week, and whether and why am I sleeping badly. The latter is often the result of a busy travel week or delivering a big event presentation. It will be interesting to see how the technology develops now that Google is acquiring them. I'm hoping nothing too significant changes, although being able to get a more detailed and granular feed of my data would be great.

Desktops

Whether you're looking to stock machines for people needing massive computing power, or small form factor PCs that can save valuable desk space, here are some of the best desktops on the market...

Shuttle XPC DS10 Series

Specs: 200(L) x 165(W) x 39.5(H) mm, available with Celeron 4205U, Core i3-8145U, Core i5-8265U and Core i7-8565U, up to 32 GB of DDR4 SO-DIMM RAM, 1x 2.5" drive and 1x M.2-2280 NVMe, dual-4K display (2x DisplayPort, 1x HDMI 2.0), 8x USB, 2x Gigabit-LAN, WLAN ac and Bluetooth, external 65W PSU

"The DS10-series comprises four fanless PCs, each with a 1.3-litre metal chassis and support for two digital video outputs and one analog D-Sub/VGA connector. The built-in processors stand for energy efficiency and deliver performance for playback of media in 4K quality. Any of them are barebones PCs and require memory, HDD/SSD or an M.2 drive to be installed. All models are approved for 24/7 nonstop operation and target professional applications such as office, digital signage or industry."

Contact: CI Distribution, GNR:Tech, Terra



Lenovo ThinkStation P330

Specs: Intel Core i5-9500, 6-Core 4.40GHz turbo processor, Intel UHD Graphics 630, 8GB memory, 256GB SSD.

"Mission-critical tasks require superior reliability and powerful performance; the ThinkStation P330 leads on both counts and does it with exceptional all-around value. Right-sized for any environment, the P330 is smaller. It can save more space across every industry – from engineering and architecture to finance and medical – without sacrificing any of the clean, functional design that makes hardware upgrades so simple for IT staff."

Contact: Spire Technology



ASUS ROG STRIX GA15

Specs: AMD Ryzen R7 APU, Nvidia GeForce RTX2060 Super, 16GB DDR4 RAM, 512GB SSD + 1TB HDD, bundled mouse and keyboard.

"Give yourself a competitive edge in esports with the arena-ready ROG Strix GA15. Designed inside and out for superior gameplay with top notch cooling, this compact Windows 10 Pro gaming desktop uses up to an NVIDIA GeForce RTX 2060 SUPER graphics card and an AMD Ryzen 7 3800X CPU to deliver fluid visuals at high frame rates."

Contact: Exertis

ECS EliteGroup Liva Q2

Specs: Fanless form factor, 4GB RAM, 32GB EMMC, Windows 10 Home, HDMI, USB3.0 and USB2.0 ports.

"Billed as the 'smallest 4K PC in the World', the ECS EliteGroup Liva Q2 Micro PC packs a 4K punch with tiny, fanless form factor (just 7cm x 7cm x 3.5cm). Powered by Intel's Gemini Lake N4000 processor, it also comes with 4GB RAM and 32GB EMMC storage with an additional SD card slot for expansion as well as Windows 10 Home. Connectivity comes via HDMI, USB3.0 and USB2.0 ports, LAN and wireless. An extremely powerful discreet PC that would be perfect as the home media centre, business machine or boardroom display."

Contact: Target Components



Zoostorm Delta L7 PC

Specs: Intel Core i5-9400F 6 Core, 6 Thread CPU, 8GB DDR4 2666MHz RAM, 480GB M.2 SSD, Windows 10 Pro, Asus H310M-A R2.0.

"This is a brand new ultra-small form factor system assembled in our 7-litre chassis. This is a versatile Intel i5 spec system which is great for multitasking and more demanding workloads. Featuring a generous 480GB Solid State Drive and multi monitor support, this system is a perfect desktop for home users, small businesses and education customers."

Contact: VIP UK

Shuttle XPC NC10 Series

Specs: 142(L) x 142(W) x 42(H) mm, available with Celeron 4205U, Core i3-8145U, Core i5-8265U and Core i7-8565U, up to 32 GB of DDR4 SO-DIMM RAM, 1x 2.5" drive and 1x M.2-2280 NVMe, dual-4K display (1x DisplayPort, 1x HDMI 2.0), 4x USB (1x USB-C), Gigabit-LAN, WLAN, external 65W PSU

"The 4th generation of Shuttle's XPC nano series brings four models based on Intel's power-saving Whiskey Lake-U processors ranging from Celeron to Core i7. All models offer two digital outputs for 4K displays at 60 Hz. One 2.5" drive (max. height 15 mm) and one M.2-2280 NVMe SSD card can be installed. Network connections include Intel Gigabit-LAN and wireless LAN. One serial port indicates what the NC10 series is intended for: digital signage, control and POS applications."

Contact: CI Distribution, GNR:Tech, Terra



Target AMD Ryzen 5 2600

Specs: 3 RGB fans, tempered glass panels, MSI GTX1650 graphics, ASRock B450M-HDV motherboard, AMD Ryzen 5 2600 3.6GHz hexacore processor.

"Designed using the free-to-use In-Store PC Builder and built by Target, this great value gaming/home PC features 3 RGB fans, tempered glass panels, an MSI GTX1650 graphics card alongside an ASRock B450M-HDV motherboard and AMD Ryzen 5 2600 3.6GHz hexacore processor. With 16GB Patriot Viper Steel Series DDR4 3200MHz memory, 240GB WD Green M.2 SSD, 1TB WD Blue HDD and 3 year warranty, there's plenty of futureproofing, making it an ideal PC for the whole family."

Contact: Target Components

Lenovo V530S SFF

Specs: Small form factor, Intel Core i5-9400 processor, Intel UHD graphics 630, 256GB SSD, Windows 10 Professional 64-bit.

"The V530s offers the convenience of four forward-facing, easy-to-access USB ports, and its large chassis fits practically anywhere in the office – easy to use, easy to move. Improve productivity with fast, responsive processors, memory, and storage – perfect for multitasking. And it's convenient for your employees that need easy access to connect peripherals. The V530s desktop's integrated firmware, TPM 2.0, encrypts your data and your passwords."

Contact: Spire Technology



Zoostorm Delta AIO L1

Specs: Intel Core i3-9100 4 Core, 4 Thread CPU, 8GB DDR4 2666MHz RAM, 240GB M.2 SSD, Windows 10 Pro, BenQ GL2460BH 24" 1080p FHD Monitor, All-in-one VESA Stand Solution, WIFI.

"This is our smallest system which ships as part of a complete desktop solution. Featuring an Intel i3 9100 high frequency quad core processor which feels snappy in Windows. This system mounts on the rear of our VESA monitor stand and ships with a BENQ GL2460BH 24" business monitor and Zoostorm keyboard and mouse for a full all in one desktop solution with the ability to add a second monitor."

Contact: VIP UK

Type C Products

C-TC-DK-HDMICR

Type-C (USB 3.00) to Multi-function dock station with USB3.0x2/SD Card HDMI+RJ45+Type-c(PD) port

£86.95
RETAIL PRICE



C-TC-HDMI-VGA

Type-C (USB 3.00) to HDMI and VGA Adapter

£59.15
RETAIL PRICE



C-TC-DK-HDMI

Type-C (USB 3.00) to Multi-function dock station with USB3.0x2 HDMI+RJ45+Type-c(PD) port

£56.50
RETAIL PRICE



C-TC-HDMI-USB3

Type-C (USB 3.00) to HDMI and USB3.0 Hub with Type C Charger port

£56.50
RETAIL PRICE



C-TC-HUB4CR

Type-C (USB 3.00) to USB hub and card reader. Supports read/write large capacity SD(HC)/TF/M2 memory cards.

£33.05
RETAIL PRICE



C-TC-LAN-HUB

Type-C (USB 3.00) to hub with 1000M Fast Ethernet adapter, you can connect mouse, keyboard and u disk

£32.15
RETAIL PRICE



C-TC-LAN1000M

Type-C (USB 3.00) to LAN 10/100/1000

£43.45
RETAIL PRICE



C-TC-CR-USB3

Type-C (USB 3.00) to Professional XQD™ USB 3.0 Reader

£39.25
RETAIL PRICE



C-TC-DIS

Type-C (USB 3.00) to Display Port Adapter, Support 4K output

£24.30
RETAIL PRICE



C-TC-HDMI

Type-C (USB 3.00) to HDMI adapter

£27.00
RETAIL PRICE



C-TC-VGA

Type-C (USB 3.00) to VGA adapter

£33.00
RETAIL PRICE



C-TC-2in1-USB3HUB

Type-C (USB 3.00) to 2 in 1 USB 3.0 hub

£21.70
RETAIL PRICE



C-TC-USB3HUB

Type-C (USB 3.00) to USB 3.0 and 4 PORT TYPE C Hub

£19.99
RETAIL PRICE



C-TC-LAN100

Type-C (USB 3.00) to RJ45 100M

£22.20
RETAIL PRICE



C-TC-LAN1000

Type-C (USB 3.00) to RJ45 1000M

£37.20
RETAIL PRICE



C-TC-CR

Type-C (USB 3.00) to USB2.0 + Micro 3 in 1 card reader, Metal

£19.80
RETAIL PRICE



C-TC-OTG

Type-C (USB 3.00) to OTG USB

£2.10
RETAIL PRICE



C-TC-AUX

Type-C (USB 3.00) to 3.5mm

£2.10
RETAIL PRICE



C-TC-USB3

Type-C (USB 3.00) to USB 3.0 Adapter

£3.48
RETAIL PRICE



C-TC-LIGHT

Type-C (USB 3.00) to Lighting Female connector adapter

£4.10
RETAIL PRICE



C-TC-MIC

Type-C (USB 3.00) to Micro USB

£2.70
RETAIL PRICE





Circular Smart Ring

Circular is the smart ring that claims to combine style with cutting edge technology to "empower you to be more energetic and productive". On the outside, Circular is sleek, seamless, and discreet. On the inside, it's powered by advanced mechanical customisation and intuitive AI.

"When it comes to user experience, we've made no compromises," says makers Circular. "The result? A seamless experience that works for you day and night."

Circular never sleeps, but insists you'll sleep better. That's because Circular synthesizes and analyses your body signals (night and day) for unique recommendations and advanced wellness correlations to improve your well-being.

You can also get real-time, personalised recommendations, control your ring, visualise your progress, meet (and compete with) your wellness community, and get impactful recommendations through the Circular app.

For more information visit <http://kck.st/2O5V9NQ>

CROWDFUNDING



Flash: World's Most Powerful 150W USB-C Powerbank

Flash has not just one USB-C Power Delivery 3.0 port but an additional 2 USB-A ports and even a wireless charging pad.

It promises to deliver the most powerful USB-C 100W Power Delivery 3.0 charge in a single battery pack while most of the competition struggles to even reach 60W. It also comes with a powerful 18W USB-A Qualcomm Quick Charge 3.0 port and a specially designed USB-A port that's compatible with Huawei, Oppo, OnePlus and Vivo's proprietary fast charge technology.

To top this off, Flash features a powerful 10W wireless fast charge pad and it even supports 2.5W Apple Watch charge meaning one powerbank can charge all your devices including all smartphones with wireless and even Apple AirPods/Airpods Pro.

To save your even more time, Flash supports pass through charging so you can charge your devices and Flash at the same time through a single power outlet.

For more information visit: <https://igg.me/at/flashpowerbank/x#/>

Rocketbook Orbit Reusable Notepad

The Rocketbook Orbit is an endlessly reusable, customisable, cloud-connected pen and paper notepad.

The Orbit utilises customised "Page Packs" that can be removed from the pad. The technology uses a magnetic base and has stainless steel rings attached to every pack of Rocketbook pages that can be lifted off the Orbit, flipped 360 degrees, and changed out for a brand new mission.

The Orbit uses patented Rocketbook reusable pen and paper technology and is forged with a hard plastic composite with a textured synthetic outer layer so the vessel that protects your notes will last for lightyears to come.

Rocketbook's patented technology means the Rocketbook Orbit is designed for endless reusability. First, use any Pilot FriXion product on your Rocketbook Orbit pages for a traditional handwriting experience. Then, simply use a damp cloth to wipe your pages clean again and again.

For more information visit: <http://kck.st/2HzlyP3>



CORNER

With so much talent in the channel, it can be difficult to sift out the freshest gear and potential tech giants of tomorrow. Stay ahead of the curve with PCR's Crowdfunding Corner...

GLAMOS: Bring Your Touchless Screens To Life

Glamos is a motion sensor that creates a virtual touchscreen anywhere. Connect it with your device and turn your screens instantly interactive. Project an invisible touchscreen near you and control a device that's far away from you.

Glamos uses its rotating mirror module to scan its surroundings. It measures the distance between the objects and itself, transforms the data into a touch coordinate, and sends the coordinate to a display screen (like your smartphone or laptop).

Whereas most other sensors detect motions within a small range, Glamos automatically scales the size of the virtual touchscreen. The screen can be as small as your smartphone screen or as big as 6 x 3ft.

Project a virtual touchscreen literally anywhere you want: on your wall, on the air, on a whiteboard – you name it. Connect Glamos with your phone then project the phone screen on a bigger screen using an HDMI cable.

For more information visit: <http://kck.st/2RbefUA>



Rugged tech and accessories

As the demand for rugged tech and IT products grow, we take a look at some of the most interesting gear in this sector right now...



Kingston IronKey D300S

Specs: 32GB / 64GB / 128GB capacities, USB 3.1 interface, FIPS 140-2 L3 hardware encryption, virtual software keyboard, epoxy sealed IPX8 waterproof zinc case

"Ironkey D300S is an encrypted USB drive with FIPS 140-2 Level 3 256-bit hardware encryption and digitally signed firmware that can help companies stay GDPR compliant. It also has a rugged design to avoid physical damage, with a zinc casing, tamper-evident epoxy seal and is waterproof up to four feet, conforming to IEC60529 IPX8."

Contact: Exertis, Hahnel, Hammer, Ingram Micro UK, Simms, Tech Data

LaCie Rugged SSD Pro

Specs: NVMe-boosted performance of up to 2800MB/s, extreme IP67-rated dust and water resistance, three-meter drop tolerance, two-ton car crush resistance, works with Thunderbolt 3 and USB-C on both Mac and Windows.

"LaCie Rugged SSD Pro features a Seagate FireCuda NVMe SSD for max Thunderbolt 3 speeds and extreme in-field durability so filmmakers and DITs can play back 6K, 8K, and super slo-mo source files anywhere – without transcoding. Rugged SSD Pro satisfies the cravings of filmmakers and DITs for a scratch disk with high-speed transfers and editing power for up to 8K high-res and super slo-mo footage."

Contact: Seagate



DOOGEE S68 Pro Rugged Waterproof Smartphone

Specs: MediaTek Helio P70 processor, 6GB RAM, 128GB storage, 5.9 inch display, Sony 21MP + 8MP + 8MP cameras, 6300 mAh Li-Polymer battery.

"The DOOGEE S68 Pro rugged smartphone has a large 5.9" full HD anti-glare mineral glass green and high definition IPS display for a great clarity screen. Powered by a Helio P70, the processor is paired with 6GB RAM and 128GB ROM and an ARM Mali-G72 MP to give huge storage capacity. Also using Android 9.0 Pie, Face ID and Fingerprint Unlock, it is sleek and easy to use. The 6300mAh battery supports 12V/2A fast charging technology taking just 30 minutes to fill up 55% power and 10W wireless charging. With up to 756 hours standby time and 80 hours talk time, there is plenty of battery life to keep going through long trips."

Contact: Doogee



Fresh 'n Rebel Bold X Speaker

Specs: IPX7 waterproof, dirt resistant fabric, slim portable design, carabiner carrying clip, rubber armouring, up to 8hrs playtime, 2 hour charge, built in mic for hands-free calls, 'Double Fun Mode' wirelessly connects two Bold speakers, 6 on-trend colours, audio in port (3.5mm), size: 160 x 95 x 38mm, 320g.

"It may sit pretty in the palm of the hand, but the Fresh 'n Rebel Bold X is designed to be taken to the extremes. Its deceptively sleek design masks a solid rubber frame and protective fabric exterior, proofed against full water immersion (IPX7) and dirt. Grasp in the hand, slip in a bag or pocket or secure anywhere with the super-tough carabiner clip and enjoy an awesome 8 hours of playtime and calls. Big bold beats is where the Bold X is at. Need a little more loud? Connect two Bold speakers wirelessly via pairing mode for double the impact!"

Contact: Hama UK

ASUS VivoBook W202

Spec: 11.6" HD display, Intel Celeron N3350, 4GB RAM, 64GB EMMC, Windows 10 Pro, 38Whr battery.

"ASUS VivoBook W202 is the ideal learning platform for enthusiastic young minds. The VivoBook W202 features ultra-fast 802.11ac Wi-Fi, an ergonomic keyboard, and rubber-lined edges and corners that help protect it against bumps and knocks, inside and outside of the classroom. It also features a unique three-piece modular design to facilitate easy on-site maintenance."

Contact: ASUS, Exertis



LaCie Rugged SSD

Specs: Transfer and edit RAW 4K video with speeds of up to 950MB/s, USB-C interface for universal compatibility, IP67 rating for extreme dust and water resistance, three-metre drop and two-ton car crush resistance, Seagate Secure self-encrypting technology.

"LaCie Rugged SSD offers filmmakers and DITs a substantial boost thanks to Seagate FireCuda NVMe speeds of up to 950MB/s with encryption plus dust, water, and drop resistance in a palm-sized solution. Enjoy spacious capacity of up to 2TB and seamless compatibility with Thunderbolt 3, USB-C, and USB 3.0 on both Mac and Windows computers."

Contact: Seagate

Hama Extreme Charging Cables

Specs: Ultra-robust Kevlar construction, almost indestructible design, superior strain relief, high durability double fabric jacket, USB-C, Lightning and Micro USB connections available, supports iPhone fast charge function (with PD charger), sturdy gold-plated plugs, aluminium housing.

"Hama Extreme Cables are built for ultimate strain, bend and impact resistant, continuing to perform where other charging cables may fray or snap. Woven with ultra-resistant Kevlar (also used in bullet proof vests), the already mechanically superior inner wires of Hama Extreme Cables are doubly wrapped in this almost impenetrable outer jacket, creating a superhuman tensile strength. Micro-USB, Lightning and USB-C, Hama cables offer a reliable source of charge for a wide range of Android and iOS devices, including support for Apple's fast charging function when used with a PD power supply."

Contact: Hama UK



Doogee S95 Pro Modular Rugged Smartphone

Specs: MediaTek Helio P90 Octa-core processor, 8GB RAM, 128GB storage, 6.18" display, 48MP + 2MP + 8MP (depth sensor) + 8MP (ultrawide angle) cameras, 3500 mAh power bank module battery.

"The Doogee S95 Pro is a rugged modular smartphone packed full of features including a 48 megapixel triple camera, 5150mAh long lasting battery and Helio P90 Processor. Smarter, smoother and faster, the S95 Pro not only comes with the latest Android 9.0 Pie OS, intelligent Helio P90 CPU and 24W super flash charging, it also has a Hi-Fi speaker and power module. Waterproof, dustproof and drop proof, the S95 Pro uses the MediaTek Helio P90 64-bit octa-core processor to release the unprecedented potential of the system on a single chip to ensure a faster gaming experience and less loading time. The industry leading microchip combined with a pair of powerful Arm Cortex-A75 CPUs with six Cortex-A55 in a single octa-core cluster and performance leading APU2.0, a powerful IMG powerVR GM 9446GPU and fast LPDDR4X memory controller, increases performance by 50% over the previous P60/70 processors."

Contact: Doogee





“There’s no getting away from the very real need to support sustainable business outcomes”

LIFE IN THE CHANNEL

3stepIT's Jason Skidmore

The Chief Commercial Officer discusses the company's focus on sustainability in the technology sector and its plans to dominate the European space...

Tell us a bit about your experience in the channel and your current role at 3stepIT?

I have been chief commercial officer at 3stepIT since 2018, having previously held the role of managing director of 3stepIT UK – leading and growing the team that is responsible for the UK operations. I've also held various channel and commercial roles throughout my career, including channel director for Dell Financial Services in Europe and commercial leader for GE Capital's UK Vendor Finance Division.

What is 3stepIT focusing on at the moment?

Today, 3stepIT is focused on developing greater awareness for sustainability in the technology sector. Reducing e-waste has to be a priority for all involved in the buying, selling and disposal of devices. Findings by the UN University report point to a clear, steady growth trend in e-waste, which is projected to continue at a rate of two million metric tonnes per year. By 2018, the world was generating almost 50 million metric tonnes, of which approximately one quarter – or 9.3 million metric tonnes – was made up of personal digital devices such as computers, displays, smartphones and tablets.

How do you support partners who are looking to become more sustainable?

At 3stepIT we are supporting businesses to reduce their e-waste by helping our customers actively manage the entire lifecycle of their devices. We are promoting the

circular economy as an alternative to device ownership, which inevitably leads the owner to dispose of assets in an environmentally friendly manner, something that we find not many organisations are able to accomplish independently. Many businesses are now comfortable with accessing essential services on a pay per use or rental basis. Most organisations focus this approach around their mobile phones or cars, but this is also a good model to adopt for computer equipment too because it enables an active device management policy.

With this setup in place, at the end of the usage contract, the customer has to return the device, allowing a Technology Lifecycle Management provider, like 3stepIT, to both refurbish and find a new home for the device, extending its use and reducing demand for scarce resources.

Our mission is simple: to help organisations become more sustainable by helping them to reduce e-waste. The channel can play a big part in this goal given its reach and relationships with mid market organisations. Financially, a circular economy model can benefit the channel as a whole. However, more importantly, a circular economy approach can support channel partners whose shareholders, employees and more widely, society as a whole, are placing increasing demands on operating in a sustainable manner. Organisations are looking to their suppliers and technology partners now, asking them questions such as “how can you help me meet my sustainability KPIs?” and in Technology Lifecycle

Management, the channel has a solution.

At 3stepIT, we support the customer with the upfront investment required to deploy business technology. Once the devices are deployed, our in-life asset management software simplifies the administration of those assets, including device tracking, cost-centre management, ensuring compliance with software and security policies.

As the contract comes to renewal, we support the customer to return devices to our refurbishment centres so that we can carry out essential repairs and resell, whilst supporting the original client to renew their device estate. All of these services can be offered via the channel as an enhancement to their existing product proposition. In doing so we help the channel to get even closer to the customer. For example, our asset management software can also integrate the entire device estate onto the platform, enabling a 360 degree view of the customer's technology landscape. This enables a wider conversation around total e-waste output and how it can be reduced by adopting Technology Lifecycle Management.

product and service excellence. The major trends we've been hearing about for the last 5-10 years: cloud, as-a-service, Internet of Things, all require a proliferation of devices but what's missing in the mainstream is also a view on how to manage these devices sustainably. Technology Lifecycle Management leans in some of these trends and is a viable and effective solution to reducing the carbon footprint for many organisations.

What's next for 3stepIT?

3stepIT was established in 1997 and has led the development of Technology Lifecycle Management as a business necessity across the Nordic region where awareness on sustainability is generally more advanced than across the rest of Europe. We've got a strong customer portfolio throughout this region because our product portfolio is widely seen as adding value by our partners and customers.

We're now taking this proposition across Europe, and to do that we have recently launched a joint venture with BNP Paribas Leasing Solutions, called 'BNP Paribas 3

Our mission is simple: to help organisations become more sustainable by helping them to reduce e-waste. The channel can play a big part in this goal"

By extending the lifecycle of technology devices, we can support partners and customers to offer a second life to a device, and in doing so help to save the carbon footprint of manufacturing another device. If we take a laptop as an example, the 'use' phase is responsible only for 10-30% of the laptop's total lifecycle CO2 emissions, the majority being in the initial manufacture. By doubling the lifetime of a laptop, the lifecycle CO2 emissions per year of use can be reduced tremendously.


What are some of the biggest things impacting the IT channel at the moment?

There's no getting away from the very real need to support sustainable business outcomes. For the channel, which has always prided itself on deep customer relationships, especially when working with mid to large sized enterprises, we believe Technology Lifecycle Management is a logical extension for those resellers who wish to go beyond a proposition based purely on

Step IT', which is now already operating in the UK, France, Germany and Italy. More countries are to follow and by the end of 2022, we will be live in 20 countries.

This new entity draws on the strengths of BNP Paribas, as a leading European bank with a very strong corporate customer base and couples that with our sustainability solution. Our combined offer delivers a service based on circular economy principles to corporate Europe; one that anticipates the needs of companies looking for more flexible and sustainable "product as a service" financing solutions. The channel has a big part to play in helping us to meet the needs of this client base.

Over the next few months, we are focusing on putting this partnership live across further markets. It is already live in: France, Italy, Germany and the United Kingdom.

We're looking forward to offering sustainable Technology Lifecycle Management on a larger scale than we've been able to before. 

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Out and about in the industry

< Agilitas and Georgia Hall raise funds for children's charity >

Channel services provider Agilitas IT Solutions announced this month that brand ambassador Georgia Hall MBE has donated her signed US Women's Open Golf Bag to help bolster funds towards Agilitas' chosen charity the Children with Special Needs Foundation (CWSNF).

Georgia Hall MBE became an Agilitas brand ambassador in early 2019, and wears the company's logo on her golfing clothing at all tournaments. She hosts a number of company events where Agilitas employees and partners are able to meet her in person, including the opening of Agilitas' new international logistics hub.

The CWSNF raises funds to support people, groups and schools to assist with their equipment, holidays and tuition. It provides essential care for children with special needs across Surrey, East Berkshire and North Hampshire, as well as helping highly talented children who find it difficult to reach their true potential without support.

With Georgia's generosity in donating her US Women's Open golf bag alongside other on-going support, Agilitas has been able to help raise over £8,000 for the CWSNF.

"I am delighted to be in a position where I can help support CWSNF. The work they have done and what they have achieved over the past 25 years is amazing. I hope this contribution will help these remarkable children and their families have a great future," said Hall. "It is a privilege to work so closely with a company like Agilitas. We share very similar values, as illustrated in our work together to support such a valuable charity."

Shaun Lynn, CEO of Agilitas, added: "It's great that Agilitas and Georgia can support an exceptional charity such as CWSNF. We hope this donation continues to enable CWSNF to realise their goals of putting a smile on tomorrow – today."



Agilitas CEO Shaun Lynn and brand ambassador and professional golfer Georgia Hall MBE

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Out and about in the industry

< Biggest tech news from... March 2014 >

Now you're up-to-date with the latest issues in tech retail, let's take a trip down memory lane to some interesting stories from yesteryear...

Shoppers to receive greater consumer protection

In March 2014, the Government outlined proposals for an 'alternative dispute resolution' (ADR) scheme to help UK consumers resolve a complaint without the cost and hassle of going to court.

The aim was to give shoppers greater access to redress if something goes wrong with their purchase of goods or services.

Creating a consumer-facing complaints website and phone line was one option being considered to reduce confusion that may be caused by the number of ADR schemes already in place. For example, there were some well established schemes in regulated sectors where the use of ADR is compulsory, such as the Financial Ombudsman Service.

The consultation also called for evidence on whether further reform is needed to simplify the ADR landscape to make it easier for consumers, while balancing it against the cost to business.

Maplin put up for sale with £200m price tag

In 2014, Maplin was put up for sale, with owner Montagu seeking a full exit from the retailer after ten years.

While many reports suggested that the electronics retailer was up for sale with a £200 million price tag, The Telegraph believed it could go for as high as £500 million. PwC was appointed to lead the sales process following a series of approaches from trade buyers. Montagu had owned Maplin since 2004. It first tried to sell the retailer in 2011,

appointing KPMG to lead the process. Since then it invested £40m into the business, extending its range of products and revamping 214 stores.

As the internet turns 25 experts ask 'what's next?'

12th March 2014 marked a quarter of a century since Sir Tim Berners-Lee pitched the idea of the World Wide Web, which has gone on to become an incredibly important part of millions of people's daily lives.

To mark the occasion, the Institution of Engineering and Technology pondered what was in store for the next 25 years of the internet, including:

- A wider range of content in a greater number of languages
- Trusted e-learning resources
- Greater inclusion of, and accessibility for, groups currently not engaged with the internet such as large parts of the developing world, the older generation and those with visual and audio impairments
- Further innovation in web technologies, for example language and format conversion
- New thinking about how we operate commercially in a digital world, with a broader choice of ecommerce and payment options
- Global governance and standards for data privacy and security, including techniques such as human factors and user-based design to improve user confidence and adoption.



NEXT MONTH

April - PCR Awards 2020

In the next issue of PCR we will be announcing all the winners from the 2020 PCR Awards show, which takes place on 4th March at The Brewery in London. We will also be running a feature looking at the importance of business printer and device security.

We will also be putting together two sector guides in the April issue:

- Printers and Accessories
- Business Machines, Monitors and Peripherals

If you would like to get involved in the April issue, here's how: For editorial enquiries contact Editor Laura Barnes at laura.barnes@biz-media.co.uk. For advertising opportunities, contact Sales Manager Sarah Goldhawk at sarah.goldhawk@biz-media.co.uk.



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